

Women Rockers and the Strategies of a Minority Position

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ABSTRACT

This article is a distillation of an ethnography conducted in the fall of 2008 of female rock instrumentalists performing in bands in the Tampa, Florida bay area. The study looked into why there are comparatively very few female rock instrumentalists (five percent of the total number of instrumentalists playing in bands in the Tampa area), what social processes need to be in place for a woman to get involved in a rock band, and what unique social challenges women face as instrumentalists in a male-dominated field. The ethnography employs Pierre Bourdieu's work on fields of cultural production, specifically his ideas of embodied cultural capital and *habitus*, to demonstrate that women are absent from rock because they lack the unique cultural capital necessary to participate in rock bands, and, furthermore, to explore what extraordinary social circumstances need to be in place for women to accumulate this cultural capital. Specifically, in this article I interpret Bourdieu's theory to emphasize the importance of agency in his concept of *habitus*, and to show how women rock instrumentalists, once they manage to become involved in bands, develop strategies to make the most of their minority position in a highly male-dominated field. Women instrumentalists in the Tampa, Florida rock music scene develop particular strategies to cope with, exploit and transform their disadvantaged position as women in a field where having a male body is a dominant form of embodied cultural capital.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past four years I have been playing in rock bands in the Tampa, Florida area as a songwriter, keyboard player, and vocalist. Although Tampa is not known within the United States as having the largest or most progressive rock scene in the country, it does have hundreds of bands, dozens of venues and represents a variety of rock genres including metal, indie, blues, punk, pop/rock and many combinations and variations of these categories. Playing in a rock band has been crucial to my evolution as a musician and composer, so I find it troubling that I rarely see other female instrumentalists collaborating in bands. In Tampa, approximately five percent of musicians playing instruments in rock bands are women, and only ten percent of bands have one or more female musician in them (Fournet, 2009).

This article is a distillation of a longer ethnography I conducted in the fall of 2008 on women playing in the Tampa rock music scene, which addressed the following questions. First, why are there comparatively fewer female instrumentalists in rock bands? Second, how is it that some women enter into rock bands as instrumentalists despite the statistical odds against them? Third, what are the social implications of this minority status on the careers and lives of the women who become rock musicians? In conducting this research I assumed the answers to these questions would be entirely social in nature given my belief that men and women are equally musically capable. In this article I will focus on my findings concerning the last research question. More specifically, I argue that women, despite the numerous obstacles and challenges they face in their field, create strategies to make the most of their minority position. Perhaps most remarkably I have uncovered how being female in the male dominated field of rock music production can become an advantageous form of embodied cultural capital unavailable to male musicians.

SITUATING MY STUDY

National Public Radio just released the unedited responses to a survey that asked seven hundred American female musicians about their experiences as women in a field dominated by men. Although the answers vary somewhat, for the most part the women relate facing significant struggles. They share everything from the difficulties of touring with children, being treated as technically incompetent by sound crews, to feeling immense pressure to be young and sexually attractive as performers. Like this NPR survey, almost all of the academic studies on women in rock music focus on the social constraints that prevent women from joining bands in the first place, or highlight the obstacles they face once they are involved in bands.

In Mavis Bayton's *Frock Rock: Women Playing Popular Music* — a sociological study of women in contemporary popular music in the UK from the 1970s to the 1990s — the author argues the dearth of women playing in bands can be attributed to a number of material and ideological constraints placed exclusively on young women in British society, including lacking disposable income and access to public space and gendered expectations concerning appropriate activities and careers (Bayton, 1998). Mary Ann Clawson, in her study of female rock musicians at the 1991 Rumble Music Festival outside of Boston, demonstrates that women lack access to the rock band as a social institution because of the early gender-segregation of children in American culture. Women, when they are girls, are not typically close friends with boys, and boys are traditionally the ones motivated and encouraged to start bands (Clawson, 1999: 106).

In an ethnography of the local rock music scene in Liverpool, England, Sara Cohen argues that women do not participate in the rock scene because band practices and performances typically occur in 'seedy' parts of town where women are less likely to venture:

The scene is concentrated around and behind the main city centre thoroughfares. These are areas that many, particularly women, might feel uncomfortable venturing into at night, and large areas of the city centre tend to be quite deserted on most nights of the week, despite recent efforts to animate the center to attract people. (Cohen, 1997: 20)

In this case, the perceived threat women experience late at night in desolate parts of town as a product of their gender functions as a larger social phenomenon that prevents women's involvement in rock bands more specifically. In these studies the authors focus on the material and ideological constraints placed on women in British and American society that significantly limit women's initial participation in rock bands.

There are other studies that focus on the obstacles women face once they are involved in bands. Groce and Cooper (1990) demonstrate the sexual harassment, unequal pay, and lack of musical appreciation local-level female musicians experience in two small southern American cities because they are women. Vaughn Schmutz, in his cross-cultural statistical analysis of popular music media coverage in the United States, Germany, France and the Netherlands from 1995 to 2005, shows that women musicians receive significantly less media coverage than their male counterparts, and that when they do receive this coverage it is predominantly relegated to peripheral popular music genres like folk and indie rock. This underrepresentation of women musicians in popular music media coverage both indicates and contributes to women's lack of power and prominence in popular music insofar as media attention is both an indicator and grantor of cultural legitimacy (Schmutz, 2009).

In these studies the focus of analysis is placed almost exclusively on the very real constraints and obstacles faced by women participants in rock bands. And indeed, a majority of my own ethnography also focuses on these limitations. What differentiates my study, however, is that I have also uncovered the ways in which women in rock are manoeuvring within their position as minorities. In other words, this paper illuminates different tactics that women, as agents, create to push against the already well-documented constraints that surround them as minorities in a male dominated field.

ROCK AS A DISTINCT FIELD OF MUSICAL PRODUCTION

To further clarify the nature of the social constraints at play in the lives of female rock instrumentalists, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields of cultural production to inform my analysis. His theory provides an elegant vehicle for synthesizing discussions of material and ideological constraints. And, more exceptionally and pertinent to the discussion in this paper, Bourdieu's work opens up a space for examining agency in the lives of women in rock music through his concept of *habitus*.

To begin, we must first see the Tampa rock music scene as a separate field of cultural production, in which participants must accumulate and possess unique forms of cultural capital in order to join and be successful participants (Fournet, 2009). In broad terms, cultural capital is a non-financial asset that grants its holder social

advantages within the environment of social relationships in which that form of asset is recognized and given privilege (Bourdieu, 1986: 46). There are a number of assets that can function as cultural capital in such an environment, including material objects ('objectified' cultural capital), connections to other individuals (properly labeled 'social' capital), and institutional affiliations and titles ('institutionalized' cultural capital). But most importantly for my purposes here, cultural capital can be the employment of embodied skill and special knowledge that is accumulated through years of exposure and activity in a particular field of cultural activity ('embodied' cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1986: 47).

In particular, in the Tampa, FL rock music scene, there are three forms of embodied cultural capital required for participation as a musician; these forms reflect the types of embodied cultural capital at play in rock music production worldwide. The first is the skill and knowledge of how to play rock music in a band, which differs greatly from knowing how to play, for example, classical music in an orchestra. To play in a rock band, an instrumentalist must be able to learn and compose in a group setting, isolate and learn parts by ear by listening to recordings, and be familiar with a large canon of rock bands and genres and be able to apply this canonical knowledge in the moment of playing. The second is the knowledge of preparing for and playing a gig at a rock music venue. The third is the knowledge of how to promote the band and its music using contemporary forms of technology and communication. In my larger study I demonstrate that there are significantly fewer women participating in rock bands in the Tampa area because they lack these forms of embodied cultural capital, and that in order to get involved these women must become exposed to a number of identifiable social processes that allow them to gain this knowledge. For example, they often come from musical families, have musical fathers or brothers, or become involved in formal music institutions like jazz groups and orchestras that are hotspots for meeting other musicians on more or less equal musical grounds (for example, sharing the same musical skill and knowledge of being able to read notated music) (Fournet, 2009: 49).

One significant reason why women lack the embodied cultural capital that would allow them to play instruments in bands is because they also lack the habitus that would incline them to see rock as an attractive pursuit in the first place. Bourdieu defines habitus as a "socially constituted cognitive capacity" that individuals accumulate as a product of their experience in a particular social position, which is determined by factors including family background, gender, age, economic class, education, and status within different subcultures (Bourdieu, 1986: 56). As I see it, habitus is embodied cultural capital before it is expressed in the context of the appropriate social universe.¹ For example, habitus would be the latent capacity to play rock guitar, whereas embodied cultural capital would be the application of this capacity in a jam session or band practice with a group of fellow rock musicians. It is important to note that habitus not only allows individuals to effortlessly participate in their habitual social fields by providing the knowledge of rituals and activities they need to perform, it also determines what fields they will pursue in the future. For Bourdieu, to enter a particular field of cultural production one must possess the habitus which predisposes one to enter that field and not another (Bourdieu, 1993:

¹The difference between habitus and embodied cultural capital in Bourdieu's theory is admittedly unclear. There are instances in which he uses the terms interchangeably, for example: "This embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange" (Bourdieu, 1986: 48). Then there are others in which the terms have different theoretical meanings and implications. In this paper I choose to use both terms, for Bourdieu provides elaborations of habitus that take it beyond the concept of embodied cultural capital that are useful for my purposes in this study.

8). Insofar as gender is a primary determinant of social position, women and men accumulate different habitus, which in turn predispose them to see different fields as attractive possibilities. In his article “Towards a Field Theory of Class, Gender, and Race,” Meisenhelder (2000) argues that male children, because they identify with their fathers’ bodies, identify with the male position and accumulate the male habitus, whereas by contrast female children accumulate the female habitus. Meisenhelder describes this phenomenon when he writes:

The habitus is a gendered structure that informs how actors perceive self and others and how they act within social fields. Actors inhabit their bodies as gendered bodies and enact strategies and practices within the social fields they encounter according to the possibilities allowed by gendered understandings of themselves and others. Gender field di-visions tend to be reproduced in the individual’s earliest and most important habitus. Images of self and other constituted through gender differences are created in the earliest years of life as a child experiences a familiar field of intimacy structured via gender di-visioning and a gendered division of labor and reward. (Meisenhelder, 2000: 76)

Thinking about habitus as a gendered structure allows us to think about the deeply formative, and often unconscious, ways that upbringing influences opportunities for women (and young girls) to accumulate certain forms of cultural capital.

For example, since playing rock instruments has been constructed as a male pursuit in American and European culture, women typically lack the habitus that would predispose them to get involved in rock bands as instrumentalists (Bayton, 1998: 41, Coates, 1997: 52). There were many instances in my study in which women would describe seeing their brother’s guitars and drum sets sitting unused in the house when they were teenagers, but would never play them because on some level they considered playing rock music something girls just did not do. Emily, the guitarist for the Tampa pop/rock band Super Secret Best Friends, recalls her brother’s 1971 telecaster guitar: “It never dawned on me: ‘Hey I might actually be able to play this instrument’ I never even touched it” (Fournet 2009: 18).

Since the gender of a woman’s body determines in many instances what embodied cultural capital she will accumulate throughout the course of her life, it logically follows that the gender of an individual’s body continues to be a significant variable in the expression of this embodied cultural capital. In my study I concluded that being a man, specifically having a male body, emerges as a fourth form of embodied cultural capital within rock that serves as a signifier of competence. It is a kind of shorthand that indicates that the individual, until he proves otherwise, possesses the skills and knowledge mentioned above needed to be successful in the field. Being a woman, specifically having a female body, by contrast, serves as shorthand for incompetence — for lacking special knowledge — and women, even after they prove their competence in other ways, have to suffer the consequences of their lack of maleness. This lack of maleness as embodied cultural capital limits women’s presence and power, at least initially, within the field and causes them to suffer a number of obstacles, such as being sexually objectified, ignored, or treated as musically incompetent (Fournet, 2009: 53). In short, what I noticed is that the gendered body one possesses functions as a form of positive or negative embodied cultural capital because it serves as an indicator of the possession of special skills and knowledge, in the case of having a male body, or a lack of skills and knowledge, in the case of having a female body. Later I will demonstrate how having a female body gets reconfigured as a positive form of embodied cultural capital as women use their minority status to their advantage.

By applying Bourdieu's theory, the collective activity of making rock music emerges as a distinct field of cultural production, with unique forms of embodied cultural capital and an historical affiliation with male activity that prohibits or significantly constrains female participation. What is most attractive about using Bourdieu's theory to frame the issue and understand the causes and ramifications of women's minority status in rock, and what is most relevant to the data in this article, is that it does not stop with an explication of social constraints. For Bourdieu, actors are limited by their cultural capital and habitus, but as agents can still unconsciously and consciously create new products that fulfill the expectations of a given social environment but which are nevertheless novel (Bourdieu, 1980: 55).

To understand exactly how Bourdieu makes room for the idea of agency in his social theory it is important to examine more carefully his concept of habitus. For Bourdieu, not only is habitus formed by exposure over time to external social relations, these external social relations are in turn constantly recreated by habitus. Bourdieu explains this phenomenon by describing the habitus as structured structures that in turn structure social reality (Bourdieu, 1980: 53). For without agents with the appropriate accumulated dispositions, social fields would be constantly changing and chaotic. At the same time, the interaction between habitus and external social reality is more than just a feedback loop, for this would get us little beyond a determinist social theory, which Bourdieu is eager to avoid because he thinks that it precludes the empirically observable fact of gradual social change (Bourdieu, 1980). If this were the case, the habitus would simply be an internalized form of social structure, and there would be no agency or unique subjective experience. Rather, Bourdieu holds that agents may create new products — thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions — that comply with the dominant forms of embodied cultural capital and, with repetition, can slowly transform this environment. Bourdieu describes in *The Logic of Practice* the simultaneous freedom and constraint that habitus gives us:

Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products — thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions — whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. (Bourdieu, 1980: 55)

Habitus allows the individual to effortlessly understand, act in, and recreate the practices and beliefs of her particular social position, insofar as it is an internal manifestation of this position. In doing so, it creates social stability. However, at the same time habitus affords a concept of the agent who has a certain amount of freedom in *how* she understands, acts, and recreates these practices.

What I will investigate in this article are the ways in which women instrumentalists in the Tampa rock music scene express their agency by generating thoughts, perceptions, and actions, which respond to the centrality of maleness as embodied cultural capital in their field, but which nevertheless allow them to *cope* with, *exploit*, and in some cases *transform* their social position as minorities. I call these various expressions of agency the strategies of a minority position. This shifts the discourse away from discussions of the ways in which women in rock are constrained and curtailed in their possible actions to a discussion of how they are using their power as agents to navigate a challenging social environment. At the end of the article I will revisit the question of social change, which Bourdieu considers to be the product of these subtle expressions of agency, and ask whether or not these strategies seem to

be changing the structural landscape of rock in relation to gender in a way that is objectively observable and significant.

METHODS AND CLARIFICATIONS OF TERMS

I carried out the research for this study over a three-month period using two primary ethnographic strategies: interview and participant observation. I conducted 29 interviews in total, 23 of which were through e-mail and 6 of which were in person or over the phone. Of the total number of interviewees, 24 were women instrumentalists playing in bands and 5 were male instrumentalists playing in bands with female members. Approximately half of the women played in all-female bands, whereas the other half played in mixed-gender groups. I generated the questions for the interviews based on my three central research questions and on the knowledge I distilled about each individual from Myspace.com, Youtube.com, and venue websites. Although I had questions prepared for the in-person interviews that addressed my central concerns, these interviews were much more freeform and wide-ranging, which allowed me to get to know the interviewee better and to understand her perspective with more depth.

During the study I also attended many shows, as both an audience member and as a rock instrumentalist in my own band. Four of these shows, which featured at least one band with a female instrumentalist, served as sites for the purpose of taking field notes. In my field notes I focused on the interactions between band members, the exchanges between band members and the crew at the venue, audience reactions, and the opinions and perspectives of bartenders and sound guys. During the shows I took short ethnographic jottings and then crafted more elaborate write ups upon returning home. Although I tried to capture the entirety of the concert experience in my jottings, I did focus more intensely on issues raised in the interviews, such as the particular treatment of female band members by sound guys or audience members and women instrumentalist's relationships to their instruments and other music technology. After completing the research, I went back through the field notes and interviews and performed increasingly nuanced rounds of coding according to my thematic and theoretical interests (Emerson *et al.*, 1995: 142). A majority of the analysis in this study is based on the data gathered from the interviews, but I call upon the field notes from time to time. This method of illuminating issues of gender in rock music through in-depth interviews and field research is in keeping with the methodology used by other anthropologists interested in women in rock (*e.g.*, Bayton, 1998; Clawson, 1999; Groce and Cooper, 1990) as well as popular nonfiction writers interested in female rock instrumentalists (*e.g.*, Carson *et al.*, 2004).

There are many social facets of the Tampa, FL rock scene that I am overlooking in this article. In an attempt to focus on gender, I am not addressing issues such as ethnicity and economic background in my analysis. Although I saw one band with black instrumentalists while conducting my field research, and one of the bands I interviewed is originally from Venezuela, the Tampa rock scene is predominantly white, American and middle class.

In order to avoid confusion about my terminology, it is important to define exactly what I mean by "rock." Rock is an ambiguous category of music and is used and understood differently from person to person. In this research, I am using rock to mean any type of popular music played by a band (meaning two or more people) using amplified electric instruments, one of which is usually either an electric guitar

or an electric bass guitar, with one or more vocalists, and typically with a drummer playing a drum set. This definition of rock allows me to include a very wide array of genres — from metal, to punk, to indie, to experimental, to blues, to rock/pop — while excluding genres like folk, jazz, acoustic singer-songwriting, industry pop, and any kind of orchestral ensemble. This definition does not hold true for everything (I can think of some bands that only play amplified keyboards that I would still categorize as rock, and many jazz ensembles that play with amplified string instruments and a vocalist which I would not categorize as rock), but it does the job in a majority of cases.

I have chosen to focus exclusively on female instrumentalists, as opposed to female vocalists in bands, because female singers in rock music are common. One can think of numerous bands with all male instrumentalists and a female lead singer, who might also double as an auxiliary percussionist (the stereotypical tambourine player). In many ways being the singer in a band is seen as a marginal position when it comes to the actual structure and integrity of the music. As Lucy Green writes in her book *Music, Gender, Education*, “The sight and sound of a woman singing affirms the correctness of the fact of what is absent: the unsuitability of any serious and lasting connection between woman and instrument, woman and technology” (Green, 1997: 29). Likewise, Marie Buscatto has pointed out that there is a “conflictual hierarchical ordering of women singers and male instrumentalists,” in which women singers categorically occupy the lower position and thus experience fewer opportunities for collaboration and career growth (Buscatto, 2007: 47). There is something different about being an instrumentalist in a rock band that contributes to the disproportionate statistics between men and women, and this is why I am focusing exclusively on instrumentalists (though it should be noted that many of the women I interviewed are vocalists in addition to playing their instruments).

THE STRATEGIES OF A MINORITY POSITION

Women in the field of rock music production in Tampa have limited opportunities and experience a number of obstacles not faced by their male counterparts because they lack maleness as embodied cultural capital (Fournet, 2009: 53). But these women are still agents with an invested interest in continuing to play music and in having a certain amount of success in their music careers, so they create strategies to make the most of their minority position. I have identified three types of strategies women utilize in light of their position as female minorities. First, there are strategies women use to simply *cope* with the difficulties of the field — these strategies render daily work circumstances more bearable. Then there are women who *exploit* their novelty as women in the field to gain more fans and more gigs. These women turn femaleness into a new form of embodied cultural capital. In the third case, there are women who seek to *transform* the rules of practice of the field of rock entirely when it comes to the role of women. For example, they take female objectification and try to transform the definition of what a sexy female is in relation to musical skill. These three types of strategies are in no way mutually exclusive, and women typically use more than one simultaneously or at different times throughout their careers. In the longer study I demonstrate that there is a spectrum of awareness women have concerning these various strategies, ranging from being very consciously aware about being a women and using strategies that address this status to being completely unaware of these strategies but nevertheless creating and implementing them (Fournet, 2009).

It must be held in mind that, according to Bourdieu, the strategies an individual agent employs in a given field, as well as the success or failure of these strategies, is contingent on her objective position in that field. He writes: “The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions (i.e. their position-takings), strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations” (Bourdieu, 1993: 30). In this application, the strategies women implement to achieve their ends and improve their chances within the field of rock music are dependent, at least in part, on their lack of maleness as embodied cultural capital. Where relevant, I will demonstrate how these different strategies are limited by or can sometimes backfire because of women’s minority status.

I. THAT’S THE WAY WE GET BY: COPING MECHANISMS

I Will Work Harder, I Will Work Harder...

For many women the biggest challenge of being a female minority in rock is feeling under-respected as a musician (Fournet, 2009: 61). But instead of addressing the underlying gender issues that inform this lack of respect, some women believe that they can remedy the situation by continuously proving themselves and working harder. They try to gain some control over the mistreatment they receive by reconstructing the issue as a simple matter of musical ability — a domain over which they have explicit power. Jessica, the guitarist and vocalist for the all women alternative rock band Still Life, understands the discrimination women face in American culture at large and in rock more specifically, yet formulates the issue as a matter of working harder, being demure, and being personable:

Jessica (guitarist and vocalist for [Still Life](#)):

It’s just that we [women] have been under-estimated since forever. And right now, you know if we start talking about the processes that women have been through to get to this point to be able to work and to be respected, it has taken hundreds of years. So maybe some day... I mean, we don’t even have the same wages here in the states. Can you imagine that? This is the most important country and we don’t even have equality. So, what can you expect in music? But it’s okay. If you keep working. I’m really proud of people like Janis Joplin, Tina Turner, all those female rock stars. I can’t imagine what it would have been like for them to get to that point. It must have just been their talent. I think it’s just a matter of working hard. And being humble. And being able to work with people.

For Jessica, being underestimated as a female instrumentalist is one of the rules of the game in rock music production that she has internalized and learned to work around (“What can you expect in music?”), but instead of capitulating to this underestimation by quitting or tolerating negative comments about her musicianship, she has committed herself to working harder (“I think it’s just a matter of working hard”). In this case, habitus enables Jessica to understand and effortlessly participate as a female in a field in which maleness is a central form of embodied cultural capital while generating new products to overcome this centrality. “Working harder” is a product of agency as both a new perception and a new action. Perceiving the discrimination she faces as a female musician as a matter of working harder subtly repositions the site of struggle to an arena over which she has direct control. Working harder, in the form of practicing, playing, and performing often, is a very clear action Jessica takes in response to the discrimination she faces. Interestingly, this

conviction to work hard on her music is intertwined with the dedication to being humble and having peaceful interactions with other people, two characteristics specifically encouraged and expected in women. Jessica is both working hard on her music skills and her skills as a woman in an attempt to get by and get ahead.

Turning It into a Game

Other women cope with their position by transforming it into a different kind of personal challenge: they turn audience's expectations of them into games. For Katherine, guitarist and vocalist for the indie/rock duo Son of Hippies, fashion is the site of her game playing.

Katherine (guitarist and vocalist for [Sons of Hippies](#)):

AF: So you feel like your image is really important in terms of how people are first perceiving you?

Katherine: You know what I think it is? I think it's like a fun little game for me. I don't dress to fuck with people, but depending on how I'm feeling I sort of know what's going to happen if I'm wearing a certain thing. If my tattoos are showing, that gives a totally different...like, "oh this is some butch, feminist going to sing about blah blah blah." Or if I'm wearing, like sometimes a skirt over jeans or like a feminine shirt, that's when they think I'm not going to play guitar very well.

Although Katherine says she is not intentionally manipulating her audience, she does gain satisfaction from anticipating and playing with their expectations through changing her dress. Katherine understands how audiences, sound guys, and other band members correlate femaleness, and female dress in particular, with certain political agendas ("some butch, feminist going to sing about blah blah blah") or musical skills ("that's when they think I'm not going to play very well"). But like Jessica, Katherine takes these rules and generates something new — in this case, a game that helps her get through the night. She is not doing anything to change these rules but she is, as an individual with an invested interest in the state of her life as a rock musician, turning what could be a negative aspect of the field into a kind of self-entertainment.

Ignoring It

A common coping mechanism I came across in my study is simply ignoring or shrugging off any discrimination. These women, instead of problematizing or getting upset about the obstacles they face as women, simply look the other way. Reah, bassist and back up vocalist for the blues/pop trio The Black Rabbits, exhibits this shrug-your-shoulders mentality towards the prejudice she faces:

Reah (bassist for [The Black Rabbits](#)):

AF: Do you ever feel like you are evaluated as a "female" instrumentalist, and not just as an instrumentalist?

Reah: Yeah. It's wrong, but that double standard will always be there, whether it's a matter of intelligence, or how well you can play a sport or instrument. Sometimes people tell me that 'I don't play bass like a girl', like they're really surprised that I can actually do it well. Some girls probably find that insulting, but to succeed in music you just can't be so easily offended by little jokes that you think are sexist or discriminating; you just have to take it for what it's worth.

Because other male musicians in the field expect Reah to lack the special knowledge needed to play in a band because she lacks maleness as cultural capital, they are surprised when she plays the bass well. Instead of dwelling on the gender discrimination implicit in these comments, however, Reah either ignores it or sees it as a compliment. Geri X, guitarist and vocalist for her self-titled pop/rock band Geri X, is aware that many women are objectified and objectify themselves in the rock music industry, but like Reah, chooses to ignore it in order to keep focusing on her music:

Geri (guitarist and vocalist for [Geri X band](#)):

There will always be groupies, there will always be half naked women in rap videos, there will always be catfights. I am on the other side shrugging my shoulders and trucking along with my music.

Both Reah and Geri recognize that women face obstacles in rock music production because they lack maleness as cultural capital, but their strategy for dealing with it is to simply not dwell on it (“I am on the other side shrugging my shoulders”). They express their agency by not thinking about the constraining elements of the field they work in, which enables them to keep working and progressing as musicians and artists.

Walk Like a Man, Talk Like a Man

In his book *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll*, Simon Frith notes a widespread phenomenon when it comes to women in rock. Since rock is such a masculine culture, the question becomes whether or not women can enter this field without having to adopt, at least to a certain extent, a masculine persona (Frith, 1983: 239; Coates, 1997: 52). I have noticed in my investigations in Tampa that many women do not adopt a masculine persona, but that for a few it is their primary coping mechanism. They take on elements of a masculine identity in an attempt to fit in and be treated as an equal.

Although Emily herself does not adopt a masculine persona, she notices that many other females in the field take this approach. The door guy at a Doll Parts show, an all-girl punk/rock band in Tampa, thought of the members of this band as playing more like guys than like girls.

Emily (guitarist for [Super Secret Best Friends](#)):

I mean you rarely see female bands that play musical instruments that act feminine. Usually, you have the Pussycat Dolls or The Supremes or whatever, but they don't play anything, they sing. Actual female bands that play instruments, like The Donnas, The Breeders, Doll Parts, they are really tough and they almost act like guys. I don't know, there is just something very masculine about those bands. They are usually really rough and punk.

Door Man at a [Doll Parts](#) show:

AF: What do you think of Doll Parts?

DM: I think they are awesome — they know their shit.

AF: How many women do you see playing in here?

DM: Not very many...I'm trying to think of the last time...

AF: What percentage would you say? Less than 10%?

DM: Oh yeah, maybe 5% or less. But Doll Parts is great. I could close my eyes and not think it's a girl band...it's the energy they use to hit their strings.

Unlike most women, who stereotypically play instruments lightly, the door man sees Doll Parts as really bringing on the full musical force like any other guy band. I also noticed that the members of Doll Parts, although wearing make-up on stage, also wore pants and t-shirts, cussed frequently, and held their instruments in a very typical, guy-rocker stance — legs apart, instrument hung low over their groin area (Bayton, 1997: 43). Adopting elements of masculine behavior, which includes the sonic manifestations of maleness like hitting strings hard, seems to work well for Doll Parts. The door guy at this show gave them respect as musicians because he thought of them as being “one of the guys” and not as a stereotypical girl band.

Playing instruments fast and aggressively is one performative gesture of maleness that is in operation in rock, and by adopting this gesture women align themselves more closely with maleness.² In the case of Doll Parts, the agency inherent in the infinite generative capacity of habitus is apparent when these women take action to transform their bodies and demeanors, including how they play their instruments, into male bodies and demeanors. These women see that maleness is the lingua franca of rock music production and adopt maleness to experience less resistance and more power in their field.

A problem with implementing this strategy, however, is that it can make women feel alienated from other women in the field. In being a little more masculine, a little rough around the edges, these women intimidate other female instrumentalists or even other women in the audience:

Katherine (guitarist and vocalist for [Sons of Hippies](#)):

They are expecting me to be a bitch. They are expecting me to give them the cold shoulder. They are expecting me to be a total asshole. And I don't want to shoot myself in the foot, but a lot of women in bands I've met are that way. Because I think that there is an extreme threat and uncomfortability. They won't talk to me, especially other women in bands. And yeah I always have to make the first move. I guess that's another thing that I'll have to get used to. Other guys might come up to me and say “Hey good job” but other girls are really standoffish.

Katherine knows that being standoffish and tough are defense mechanisms she and others adopt in the field to hold their own with men, but this makes it much more difficult to befriend other women. It appears that adopting maleness as an element of cultural capital has its drawbacks, for although it may get them somewhere with men it concurrently isolates them from other women. This is still advantageous when most people in a position of power in the field are indeed men — other musicians, door guys, booking agents, sound technicians, producers — but it disadvantageously perpetuates the sense of alienation women experience as rock musicians. Playing and acting like a man is a coping mechanism that has shortcomings, which are rooted in women's minority position.

²For more on the significance of embodied musical gesture in the constitution and perpetuation of gender roles in musical fields, see Tia DeNora's work on the gendered performances of Beethoven's piano music in the 19th century (DeNora, 2002).

Marry Me

Allying with men in the field, as opposed to acting like a man, is another coping strategy. In creating partnerships with men, specifically in the form of marriage, women benefit from the man's cultural capital and consequent higher social position.

Annie attached herself to her guitarist, now husband, Craig at an early point in her rock music career and attributes much of her success to this alliance:

Annie (singer and band leader for [The Freight Train Annie Band](#) and organizer of Skipper's Girly Night):

Craig did everything without taking advantage of me. He was the perfect gentleman. He would steer me away from certain people. I realize that now but I didn't know that then. He would just be like "Oh, you really don't want to know that guy." I don't think I would have gotten as far as I did if I hadn't met Craig.

Craig kept her away from people in the field who might have taken advantage of her as a woman, and as I learned later, also showed her how to run the sound equipment at shows and taught her a majority of what she knows about the technical aspects of the music business. Sheila has done something similar:

Sheila (guitarist and vocalist for [The Sheila Hughes Band](#)):

I actually know very little about running the equipment. If I had to do a gig by myself and set it all up, I'd be in trouble. Before my husband Chris started performing with me as a bassist, he was a soundman. The genius behind what we do technically lies in his brain. He's always been incredibly technically savvy.

Sheila could take on the role Craig currently fills if she needed to, but instead she defers the work to her technically savvy husband and devotes her time to songwriting and working on her performance. The action of marrying a man in the field works within the rules of rock music production, for it capitalizes on and also reinforces the centrality of maleness as cultural capital, but it also expresses a woman's agency insofar as she is taking advantage of the sexual alliances available to her to further her rock music career. The problem with this strategy is that it creates a parasitic relationship — the woman is relatively dependent on the man's position for her own success, putting her in a situation of comparative helplessness. Marie Buscatto uncovered a similar phenomenon in the world of French jazz, in which a majority of the female artists who managed to hold their own in the field were those who had a male instrumentalist as a romantic partner. She likewise notes that these relationships are often parasitic and that breakups can very costly for the career of the female partner (Buscatto, 2007: 51).

Create a Fortress

A similar strategy to marrying a man is for a woman to organize a posse of musicians around herself, who respect her completely as a musician and who value her as a whole human being. This then in turn serves as a kind of fortress against the difficulties of the larger field.

Jax attributes her success to having a supportive family and having a band full of women who respect her and sympathize with her situation:

Jax (drummer for [Kore](#)):

If we didn't have the complete support of our families, we probably wouldn't be able to do this. It helps that we're all wives and moms, so we can relate to each other and know that though the band is important and we are totally committed, family will always come first.

For Annie it took a long time to create this fortress, but now that she has it she feels much less anxiety as a female musician:

Annie (singer and band leader for [The Freight Train Annie Band](#) and organizer of Skipper's Girly Night):

And when I come across someone now, I'm just like "Oh, you're one of *those* guys, on to the next person." Because I can't take them seriously. Before I didn't have that luxury. Venue-wise and everything like that. And I used to settle because I didn't know any better.

Jax, Annie and other women in rock construct a safe space, almost like a field within a field, in which the discrimination women face in the larger field of rock is absent or at least less acute. Although this action alleviates some of the obstacles women face, it reinforces maleness in the rest of the field. Women who create fortresses are sequestering themselves within the safety of their posse of girlfriends or sympathetic male friends, and perpetuating the stereotype that women are not true participants in rock music and are instead outliers functioning on the fringes of the field. This is the same issue participants in the Riot Grrrl movement faced in England in the 1980's and the American northwest in the 1990's. Because participants in Riot Grrrl were so adamant about creating their own vehicles for publicity and performance, like independent Riot Grrrl fan magazines ("zines"), labels, and venues, music journalists depicted Riot Grrrl in mainstream popular rock music discourse as a separate group of radical feminists making music exclusively for other radical feminists, and as such not a real part of rock music production (Coates, 1997: 55).

Stay an Outsider

Some women confront their minority status in rock by conceiving of themselves as not "real" participants in the field. They will write songs, practice, and even play shows, but they still do not identify as legitimate rockers. I see this as a coping mechanism: if these women do not identify as full-fledged participants in the field, they do not have to face the fact that they are minorities and the corresponding social implications of this status.

Gina (singer and guitarist in multiple Tampa bands in the 1990's, owner of the local music venue The Bombshell Gallery, and pop music critic at the St. Petersburg Times from 1999-2005):

In every circumstance, and I mean every single one, when I had female musicians play at Bombshell, they were ridiculously and impractically shy and humble about their skills and their music. Where guys would boast, girls would shrug. On way too many occasions the girls would go so far as to refuse payment at the end of the night or offer some of the money back to me. It was astounding. The boys NEVER did anything like that. It was like something was ingrained in these young women: we are just lucky that you booked us, we don't deserve this, we're not a "real" band, etc. It was mind-boggling. I do think that kind of insecurity, that wishy washiness, has

much to do with the lack of females in bands. They're not sure they're "allowed," or something.

Part of the reason why these women feel like they are not allowed is because, well, they are not — rock is still a masculine field seen by many as only appropriate for men. But it is curious that these women maintain this attitude of not belonging even after being in a band and playing at a high profile local venue like The Bombshell Gallery. By shrugging off their musical abilities and accomplishments (“they were ridiculously and impractically shy and humble about their skills and their music”) women are distancing themselves from the common practice of scrutinizing female musicianship (Fournet, 2009: 61). If these women choose to not see themselves as musicians, or at least good musicians, it is no longer such a threat that female musicians are perceived of as being inferior instrumentalists by other male band members, audiences, and venue workers. Being a rock musician is not a part of their identity and as such not something that can be threatened by negative musical evaluation.

Howard Becker, in his work on art worlds, writes that there are four typical ways an artist relates to an ‘art world’ (his analogous term for a field of cultural production): as an integrated professional, as a maverick, as a naïve artist, or as a folk artist (Becker, 1976). My study suggests that there might be a fifth category: the integrated outsider. These are the artists, like the female rock musicians that play in bands at The Bombshell Gallery, who create works by the standard conventions of the field, but who do not consider themselves to be true participants in the field because they feel alienated, not by the artistic conventions of the world (the way a maverick or a naïve artist would feel alienated), but by the social conventions of the world, like gender requirements and expectations for participation.

Working harder, turning it into a game, ignoring it, allying with men, acting like a man, creating a fortress, and staying an outsider are all activities women engage in to cope with their subaltern status in rock. With these coping strategies women play with the centrality of maleness as embodied cultural capital to create an environment for themselves that allows them to keep working. With all of these strategies there is still the obvious problem that they do nothing to ultimately transform the position of women in rock. Although these strategies make these women’s individual experiences of participating in rock more tolerable, their minority position in the field, along with its corresponding obstacles and constraints, remains little changed.

II. FLAUNT WHAT YOU GOT: FEMALENESS AS CULTURAL CAPITAL

Women in rock are unique. They stand out in a line-up of male musicians; they pique an audience’s curiosity. Having female instrumentalists gives a band an edge over their competition, which is important in Tampa where hundreds of bands are competing for audience attention. Many of the bands I interviewed used the uniqueness of having women in the group to their advantage in booking shows, hooking new fans, and finding other bands to play with. Some women simply rely on their novelty, whereas others purposefully emphasize their sex appeal to get what they want. A significant number of women I interviewed had also realized that as women they could capitalize on what they identified as the lesbian audience in the rock music market. In these three ways femaleness becomes a new form of embodied cultural capital that is available for women in rock to exploit but that is still very embedded in a system of possibilities in which maleness is the dominant form of capital.

Novelty and Sex Appeal

The women I interviewed figured out that they could use their femaleness to get an audience interested in the music they make. Stephanie, the guitarist for the mixed gender pop/rock group Some Day Souvenir, emphasized this frequently in her interview.

Stephanie (guitarist for [Some Day Souvenir](#)):

When we do posters we try to emphasize the women most of the time I would say. Because people will see that and say “Oh, chicks in a band. What’s this about?” And that’s their reaction typically. But if we can get them in, that’s all we want to do. Because we know that once you’re in you’re going to listen, and you’re going to stand there and keep listening. We’ve seen it over and over again, so that’s what we want. But if we didn’t emphasize the women to begin with, like I said, we’d just be another band.

There are five members of Some Day Souvenir, but only the three women make it onto the promotional material. This band has figured out that they can emphasize the female novelty to catch new fans, but then keeps these fans through making good music (“But if we can get them in, that’s all we want to do. Because we know that once you’re in you’re going to listen, and you’re going to stand there and keep listening”). Here femaleness as a novel deviation from the standard of maleness works in tandem with other forms of cultural capital key to rock music production, like playing instruments well and putting on a good show, to give Some Day Souvenir a real advantage over other bands in the Tampa rock music scene.



Figure 1: Some Day Souvenir promo picture

Men in rock concede that women have this uniqueness and are well aware of that fact that bands with one or more female member tend to get more attention:

Jetson (guitarist for [The Black Rabbits](#)):

I love female rock instrumentalists and have always wanted one in our band to give us that uniqueness. One of my favorite bands is The Pixies, which has a female bassist who also sings. I think that when anyone sees a female rock instrumentalist they remember the band simply because of that fact.

In the case of The Black Rabbits, Jetson’s interest in female instrumentalists is what fueled the recruitment of their female bass player, Reah. In this situation femaleness benefits both the individual woman, Reah, who was recruited to be in the band in part because she is a girl, and the band as a whole — a record label out of Orlando was considering signing The Black Rabbits at the time of the study, in part because the label thinks that the female bass player is highly marketable.

With Some Day Souvenir and The Black Rabbits, it is primarily the uniqueness and novelty of women playing rock that really gets people’s attention. But in a predominantly heterosexual social universe populated mostly by men, women can also exploit the specifically sexual dimension of their femaleness to gain attention and support. Here Corey talks about her previous band, an all-girl band called The

Great Big No Ones, and how having cute female members really inspired male attention:

Corey (guitarist for [My Little Trotsky](#)):

It was different [with The Great Big No Ones] because I think guys were more interested in a band of three girls... I think that the girl drummer was very intriguing for people. The girl singer, OK, and even guitar and bass you see, but a girl drummer, people wanted to...And she wasn't the greatest drummer in the world, but she was cute as a button and that's all that really mattered.

The Great Big No Ones used their sexual appeal strategically, capitalizing on male sexual interest in cute female band members to get shows and secure audiences. In this case, unlike with Some Day Souvenir, the capital of female sexuality is not wedded with other forms of cultural capital, like being able to play instruments well, but stands alone in cultivating the success of the band ("and she wasn't the greatest drummer in the world, but she was cute as a button and that's all that really mattered").

Dari, the lead singer for Some Day Souvenir, will use the sexual component of her femaleness to her band's advantage as well:

Stephanie (guitarist for [Some Day Souvenir](#)):

We always say to our lead singer: "Dari, if you go into a club and people see you, and then you say hey this is my band, they are going to want to get back to you!" She needs to be out there! So we've been really trying to push her to use what she can. Like wherever we're playing, she'll turn to me and be like: "OK, I'm taking one for the team." And I'm always like "Yayeah!" And then she'll go flirt with whoever just to get whatever she needs to get.

For Some Day Souvenir, Dari's sexual attractiveness pays off when a majority of booking agents, sound guys, and other band members are heterosexual men. Although we can speak of the field of rock music production as a distinct social universe in which identifiable forms of cultural capital come into play that are unique to that universe, it is nevertheless embedded in other more universal facets of human interaction, like sexuality. The fact that heterosexual men dominate the field of rock music production means that women have the advantage of being able to use their sexuality to gain attention and accumulate a certain form of power.

More Perks

A potential benefit of using femaleness strategically is getting help from men with heavy equipment or bothersome technical problems.

Emily (guitarist for [Super Secret Best Friends](#)):

The one thing that is nice, most of the time when I pull up, they realize that I'm a female and they help me with all of my equipment. Which you don't see with guy bands.

Similarly, Corey (guitarist for [My Little Trotsky](#)):

I may have it easier since I am a pianist now playing guitar in a band. I know that I will never play guitar as well as piano. I don't care if I look like a girl who doesn't know anything, and if my guitar starts making a bad buzzing noise (as it did this weekend) - I just appeal to the soundman's good nature with a big smile and say,

“can you fix this for me?” A very girly approach. I think I used to want to be one of the guys but then realized that one of the girls was more unique.

Here, using sexuality not only helps to get gigs and fans, it helps in trying to resolve sound issues and technical problems. Corey is quick to point out though that she only goes with this flirtatious, “I’m a stupid girl” strategy when she is playing guitar, her second instrument, because she has not invested her identity as a musician in this instrument and does not mind looking stupid with it.

Drawbacks

One negative consequence of using femaleness advantageously is feeling cheap, like women are not being held to the same musical standards because they are instead relying on their novelty or sex appeal:

Katherine (guitarist and vocalist for [Sons of Hippies](#)):

AF: You said in your e-mail interview that once you’ve proven yourself as a musician and all this, that being a female works to your advantage but “unfortunately?”

Katherine: Because the bar’s lower. And I guess I can prove myself up and down as a great musician and if I was a guy it would be obvious or expected of me...so yeah it does work to my advantage. And not unfortunately. Great for me, I guess. I guess I never wanted it to happen that way. I don’t want it to happen that way. I think that’s really cheap. I guess that’s what I mean. Unfortunately, something as ridiculous as gender will help me.

Katherine recognizes that her femaleness works to her advantage (“so yeah it does work to my advantage”), but at the same time laments that this only works for her because gender is still such a central component of rock as a social universe. Getting extra attention for being a good female guitarist makes Katherine feel like her gender is more important than her musical skills, which in turn makes her feel cheap and like she’s not a real participant in the field (“I can prove myself up and down as a great musician, and if I was a guy it would be obvious or expected of me”). The implication here is that since she’s not a guy, and as such not a real rocker, being a great musician is not expected of her.

Another negative consequence of emphasizing femaleness to attract a crowd is that it can become a gimmick that quickly loses its effectiveness. Super Secret Best Friends had a quick rise, which they attribute to their femaleness, but are now seeing a drop off in the number of shows they are playing:

Alex (drummer for [Super Secret Best Friends](#)):

We had a really quick rise in the beginning. It seemed like every single venue kept getting better, better, better. And we were even paired with a national act towards the beginning — Leslie and the Lys. And I think the gimmick got us there. It really did. I mean, Leslie and the Lys. Who else are you going to get? It was a perfect match. So I don’t know if the gimmick’s worn off. I don’t know.

Women in the field who are using their novelty status to be successful have to be careful. Because women are still stereotypically viewed as being inferior musicians, who only get attention for physical attractiveness and novelty, promoting the female aspect of a band can quickly come to be seen by audiences and other bands as a cheap trick being used to fill a venue, and as a consequence lose its effectiveness.

The Lesbian Audience

I discovered through this research that there is a lesbian audience within the rock music market that bands with female members can easily tap into. With this audience, female bands have wildly supportive fans, little competition, and can make a lot of money. Some Day Souvenir received national coverage in the December, 2008 issue of Curve Magazine, a lesbian magazine based out of San Francisco, and could potentially tour the entire country just playing at gay venues. Stephanie talks about the perks of playing to the lesbian audience:

Stephanie (guitarist for [Some Day Souvenir](#)):

The thing is that the gay places, they pay you very well, you have contacts that you know on a personal level, you can get in there any time. Whereas in normal venues, you don't know who is doing to the booking, they don't know you, the pay is...you know... you're lucky if you walk away with \$75, \$100. Enough for people to have gas money, if that, versus everybody in the band walking away with a couple hundred bucks in their pockets. I mean, it's huge.

Only women in rock have the advantage of playing at lesbian venues. Of course, there are many markets they cannot cater to, but at least there is one that is there's alone for the taking. But targeting the lesbian market is not without its consequences. Some Day Souvenir wants to play to lesbian crowds, but this creates tensions within the band between the male and female members. At lesbian events, the women get all of the attention and press coverage, whereas the men are left feeling that they are not even accepted at the event in the first place.

Stephanie (guitarist and vocalist for [Some Day Souvenir](#)):

In Orlando they had asked us to play over there, and we did. And they actually took all our promotional stuff that we gave them and they cut the guys out of everything! And they were pissed about it! And the guys are cool. They get that we want to play to whoever wants to hear us. And we don't try to be one thing this or one thing that, like I want to play to everyone. And they feel the same way. But they were a little...that pushed it over the edge a little bit.

Partially as a result of this tension in the band Some Day Souvenir has lost its two male members since I conducted the initial interviews. The other problem with marketing to the lesbian audience is becoming pigeonholed — success with the lesbian audience does not necessarily translate into success with the rest of the rock music audience. In speaking about a lesbian event Sons of Hippies played while on tour in Boston, Katherine expresses her concern that marketing to this niche market could ultimately limit their fan base.

Katherine (guitarist and vocalist for [Sons of Hippies](#)):

But my worry is that in any given social context there is such a tendency to get pigeonholed. But maybe the way we think these days we need an image, a label or a category to attach something so broad as music to. Which is ok as long as you are there and you are marketed to this or this, it's not just this one thing that's supporting you and then you become it.

For Katherine the fear is that capitalizing on lesbian audiences and venues as a woman would spell the end of her success with other markets, (“it's not just this one thing that's supporting and then you become it”). Despite the problems of marketing

to lesbian audiences, it is still a strategy that advantageously utilizes femaleness to the band's advantage.

The Individual vs. Women

The most problematic aspect of using femaleness to an artist or a band's advantage is that its efficacy is predicated on the continued absence of women in the field. The novelty of femaleness only works to one's advantage if women indeed remain novel, and the sexual component of femaleness only continues to confer special advantage if women operate in a field dominated by heterosexual men. Like the coping strategies explored above, using femaleness as cultural capital works great for the individual but does nothing to improve the situation of women in rock in general.

Corey, in a discussion about how she never really thinks about the absence of women in rock, realizes that she thinks this way because she is subconsciously trying to maintain her advantage by keeping other women out of the field:

Corey (guitarist for [My Little Trotsky](#)):

AF: But you were not thinking that it was a shame that there weren't more women having all the fun you were having playing music?

Corey: No, I wasn't thinking that. Which is odd because I think that about every other aspect of life. Like jobs. I've always been very pro-women in sports, women at work. I think maybe I just had my niche and I didn't want to spoil my specialness by having a lot of other girls come in, subconsciously.

Women in rock, like Corey, consciously or subconsciously read the social terrain of their field and implement strategies that help them to be as successful as they can be given their position as minorities. In this case, they use their femaleness to try to overcome their lack of maleness. This can take the form of using female novelty to draw audiences, female sexuality to books shows, and female appeal to lesbian audience members to get gigs and hook fans. The paradox of using femaleness as embodied cultural capital is that it only works if maleness is still the standard for rock music participation. As Corey acutely observed about her behavior, the special niche women occupy in rock only works if not "a lot of other girls come in." Not only is the effectiveness of femaleness predicated on the continued paucity of women, there are a number of drawbacks to using femaleness as cultural capital, like feeling cheap and being disregarded as a gimmick.

III. CHANGE THE RULES OF THE GAME

Not all the strategies women in rock implement to further their careers and make the most of their day-to-day activities assume the centrality of maleness as embodied cultural capital. Instead, some women seek to transform the central rules and stereotypes in operation in rock music production pertaining to the role of women.

In talking about the field of French literary production in the nineteenth century, Bourdieu writes that the field of cultural production "is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (Bourdieu, 1993: 42). While there were many struggles at play in the field of French literary production, such as fighting to secure publishers and good press from influential critics, a fundamental struggle was defining who got to

participate in the field and who was excluded. The same holds true for the contemporary field of rock music production. There are many struggles at play, such as securing gigs and accumulating positive press, and one of these is defining who gets to participate in rock and who does not. Some women in rock are actively engaged in this struggle to redefine what constitutes a rocker, especially in terms of gender, and they are doing so in two ways: one, they are transforming the definition of female sexual attractiveness and two, they are consciously clearing a path for future female instrumentalists by being role models or by creating events designed specifically to encourage other female rockers.

A New Female Sexuality: Competent and Sexy

One of my interviewees reminded me that being a rock star is sexy, no matter what gender you are. Standing on a stage, holding a guitar or belting into a microphone invites a certain amount of sexual objectification, period. But for male musicians, sexuality is not the only measure of value. Musical skill and song and lyric writing abilities are valued equally, if not more. For women, the unique struggle is that they are often exclusively or primarily perceived and judged as sexual objects. If they are good at their instruments, it is seen as an attractive elaboration of their sexuality. Some women in the field, however, are rewriting this stereotype by positing a new, multi-dimensional female sexuality that incorporates talent and competence with physical attractiveness.

Isabel (bassist and vocalist for [Rickety-Rag](#)):

I am very aware of my sexuality as a musician. I notice the way the other band members talk to me or about me always in a sexual or flirtatious way. They prefer me to sing songs in a sexier way than I do. I want to represent the female sex as a musician and I am not shy of my sexuality either. I am influenced by strong women icons in the music business including Big Mama Thornton and Janis Joplin. I want to not only emulate but also *be* the strong woman persona. This means to me that it is okay to be sexualized as long as it is on your own terms.

Isabel does not say here what these terms are, but based on the role models she listed it makes sense to speculate that her strong woman persona means being sexually attractive while not entirely sexually available, all the while being musically skilled and confident in this skill. Jax too is comfortable with sexiness, so long as it is not the only thing audiences see in her:

Jax (drummer for [Kore](#)):

Men are men. They are very visual and happen to like to visualize beautiful sexy women. I don't think that's a bad thing necessarily. I just think a woman can be beautiful and sexy without being trashy or cheap. Do I try to use it to my advantage? I'm not sure I'd be human, or female if I didn't. But rather than conform to someone else's idea of what's sexy, I guess I try to make being a confident, happy, strong-minded, musician the new sexy.

After sexualizing themselves in the stereotypical way, the members of Super Secret Best Friends decided they would start to reconstruct female sexual attractiveness on their own terms:

Stephanie (keyboardist for [Super Secret Best Friends](#)):

We don't want to sexualize ourselves or desexualize ourselves, you know? Personally, I mean, I'm very girly. I always have makeup on. I'm wearing a dress right now. It's

not fake for me to want to put something on like that, but it's almost embracing it and taking it to another level.

Isabel, Jax, and Stephanie are not simply using their female sexuality as cultural capital. Although there is an element of this, for any time they emphasize their sexuality in a field dominated by heterosexual men they are exerting influence and power, what is more important here is that they are defying and redefining the stereotypes and expectations of female sexuality that are in operation in rock. Instead of being cute and incompetent, these women are cute and competent. Instead of being girly and humble, they are girly and confident. In other words, they are attempting to transform the operative definition of the sexual female in rock from the sexy and attractive but musically inept stage ornament to the sexy, attractive and also musically capable, fully-integrated band member.

Clearing a Path

Other women in rock see themselves as clearing a path for other women to enter the field in the future. The hope is that the rules of the game regarding gender will inevitably change as more and more women become involved. Many women clear this path by functioning as role models. Both Stephanie and Katherine see themselves functioning as role models:

Stephanie (guitarist for [Some Day Souvenir](#)):

I automatically connect with the females in the audience because, you know they're at the shows, they're cheering — and guys, I mean, they have every other band — so when I have that connection, whether it's just looking at them, making eye contact, there is a certain reaction that I have...I know that I just made a difference in somebody's life.

Likewise, Katherine (guitarist and vocalist for [Sons of Hippies](#)):

I want people to know that they can do it as women. I hope that we get there. I want to get there.

Annie has taken her efforts a step further. In the fall of 2008 she organized “Freight Train Annie's Girly Show” at Skipper's Smokehouse, a popular rock and blues music venue in the Tampa area, which is a night dedicated exclusively to music acts with female members. The idea is to market this night specifically to women so that they feel welcomed and encouraged to play out. Since the show started, Annie notices that more and more women are coming to play:

Annie (singer and band leader for [The Freight Train Annie Band](#) and organizer of Skipper's Girly Night):

Women are all in these little crevices and they've all been coming out of the woodwork since this started. I have like six artists lined up asking me when the next Girly Show is.

In transforming the significance of female sexuality and in clearing a path for other female musicians, these women are working to erase maleness as a dominating component of the field of rock. In the first case, women are trying to reposition the female body and female sexuality so that it correlates with competence and skill instead of incompetence and amateurishness. In the second case, they are at least making an attempt to displace maleness as embodied cultural capital by filling the field with more women. The hope here is that as skilled and successful female

instrumentalists in bands become more numerous, the centrality of maleness as a sign of competence and acceptability will naturally deteriorate.

DISCUSSION

Women instrumentalists in rock bands have the bad luck of having female bodies in a field in which having a male body is one of the most basic standards of participation. But since we are still agents with an investment in the flourishing of our art and livelihood, we engage in a significant amount of extra-musical creative work to overcome the demerit of female bodies. We work harder in our alone time, we sexualize ourselves, we de-sexualize ourselves, we marry our guitarist, and we try to help other women — all as part of staying afloat in a field in which our body automatically puts us at a disadvantage. The few women who become involved in the Tampa, Florida rock music scene learn through months and years of playing in rock bands that maleness is a form of embodied cultural capital key to the field and, unlike other forms of embodied cultural capital like being able to play the guitar or run a successful sound check, they will never accumulate it barring significant body modifications. This state of the field molds their habitus, impressing on their understanding of how the rock music scene works the importance and implications of maleness in how to act and interact with other participants. But because of the infinite generative capacity of habitus explored above, which implies the innate creativity and freedom of human individuals, these women use this understanding of the centrality of maleness to think and act in ways that help them ameliorate their lack of embodied cultural capital.

I think that these subtle expressions of agency are worth highlighting in their own right, but the next logical question to ask is whether or not they are engendering any kind of objectively observable and significant change on a structural level when it comes to women in rock. Bourdieu attributes gradual social change to the aggregate deviations individual agents produce as they learn, use, and bend the rules of a particular social universe. I have already noted that the strategies women use to cope with or exploit their position as minorities do nothing on a structural level to dislodge maleness as the standard of gendered embodiment in rock. In these two cases, women are simply working around the centrality of maleness but doing nothing to change it. But what about the strategies women are implementing to try to transform the centrality of maleness. Are they creating observable changes in the Tampa rock scene? Are there more women in the field as a result of these strategies? Are women making as much money as their male counterparts? Are definitions of female sexuality in music actually changing on a structural level because of women like Isabel and Jax? At this point in my work I am not in a position to give definitive answers to these questions, as more research is necessary. However, based on what I know now, I am led to believe that the answer to each of these questions is “no.”

According to the statistics on Billboard.com, women accounted for “nearly half of the 20 music stars with the best performance on the Billboard 200 albums chart and the Hot 100 chart over the last 10 years” (Billboard.com). Although women pop artists, like Britney Spears, Beyoncé, and Kelly Clarkson are holding their own in industry top-forty music, the statistics for women instrumentalists in local music scenes remain little changed. Almost two years after conducting the original fieldwork for this ethnography, the ratio of male to female instrumentalists playing in bands in the Tampa area is the same. If you check the line-ups for the local venues, you will still see the average number of women instrumentalists hovering around 5%.

With the research I am doing now on the same topic in Lima, Peru, this statistic also applies.³ So although the strategies are in place to encourage more women to participate, it seems that they are having little impact.

All of the women in my study had non-musical jobs that provided their primary income and allowed their music to be a hobby that generated little or no money. There were no women in the study who worked as full-time professional musicians — the kind of musicians who play at short notice in any band that requires their instrument. While there are men in the Tampa popular music scene who make a living as professional musicians, I did not come across a single woman doing the same. Although I lack the statistics to numerically substantiate this observation, it is significant that, despite the work women do to make the most of their minority status, they are not making a living as professional rock music musicians like some of their male equivalents.

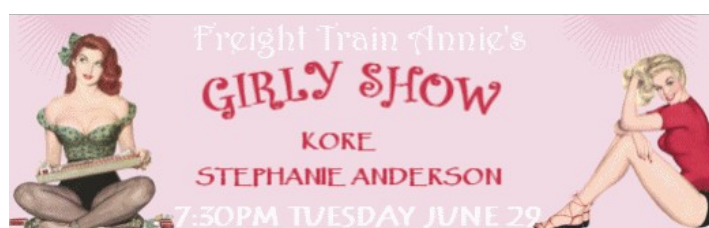


Figure 2: Online Promotional Flyer for Freight Train Annie's Girly Show

This is a recent advertisement for Freight Train Annie's Girly Show (June 29th, 2010), featuring Kore, one of the bands from the study. While I think it is a positive sign that the Girly Show is still going strong after two years, the imagery of this advertisement makes me doubt the efficacy of women's attempt to reposition the definition of female sexuality in rock. The creators of this advertisement are still exploiting the traditional definition of women in rock — the sex object who does not play an instrument and instead functions solely as alluring eye candy. Jax, the drummer for Kore, says that she uses her female sexuality to attract men but then subverts their expectation that a sexy woman will be a poor drummer by instead being a confident and competent drummer. The question then is whether the audiences who come to this show begin to associate these images of sexy women with female musical competence once they see someone like Jax, tearing it up on the drum set, or if they leave with their definitions and expectations little changed. This question requires a longer study that looks into audience perceptions of female artists over time, but at this point this image gives me little hope. If the definition of the sexy female musician were actually changing we would hope to see images of sexy female musicians playing their instruments and not images of half naked pin ups girls.

CONCLUSION

Women in Tampa continue to constitute 5% of the instrumentalists playing in rock bands, they make their living outside of playing music unlike some of their male counterparts, and they are still facing blatant patterns of female sexual objectification despite the efforts many of them are making to redefine female sexuality. Significant change is unapparent. So what is the academic value of pointing out these

³Since March of 2010 I have been in Lima, Peru with a Fulbright research grant, looking at similar research questions concerning the female rock musicians in Lima. In this research I am using participant observation to look more closely at how female musicians communicate about music and how this differs from musical communication within groups of male musicians.

expressions of agency if they ultimately have little structural impact on women's gendered role in the field?

First I think that it is important as a celebration of women musicians' work and creativity. Not only do these women devote a significant amount of their time to writing and rehearsing their music and studying their instruments, they have the additional task of creatively managing the consequences of their female bodies in a field that revolves around men. By pointing out the different ways women strategically work around the centrality of maleness we are shining light on a plane of creative work that typically goes unnoticed. We might in normal circumstances appreciate the creative work female rock artists put into their musicianship, songwriting, and stage performance, just as with male artists, but unless we do a deeper analysis of the field of social possibilities women encounter in rock we can easily overlook the creative work that goes into just getting by as a woman in a masculine social universe.

In my current research in Lima, I am also discovering how these micro expressions of agency can actually become new forms of embodied cultural capital within a subfield of perceptive female rock musicians and fans. For example, the way that Katherine of Sons of Hippies turns audience expectations of her into a game, or the way Isabel of Rickey Rag is constantly thinking about and acting out her strong female identity as a bass player, become actions that, if recognized by perceptive audience members (typically female), are seen as being extremely admirable and clever. There are indeed audience members who are beginning to recognize the extra work women put into their lives as rock musicians, transforming these subtle acts of agency into status-enhancing embodied cultural capital, at least within the micro context of these hyper aware audience members.

It is also true that any strategies women use to stay in rock music are important because they keep these women in the field to serve as role models for future generations of female rock musicians. I think that the only way to ultimately transform the gendered terrain of rock is to reposition it as an institution that is equally suitable for male and female musicians, and a crucial factor in this repositioning process is having more and more women in the field that serve as role models for younger girls. In my current work in Lima I am interviewing younger audience members about their experiences of female musicians in rock bands. Last month at a concert for an all women rock group called Las Amigas de Nadie, I spoke with two ten-year-old girls who came to the concert with one of the girl's father. They told me that they want to start their own band because of Las Amigas de Nadie, and the father confirmed their blossoming interest in rock music since discovering this all-women band. Whether it is Tampa or Lima, I think that girls are going to be more interested in becoming musicians in bands if they have female rock musician role models to look up to. Even if these girls continue to have a female gendered habitus as a result of growing up in a highly gendered society, rock can still become a field open for them to pursue if there are other women already pursuing it whose bodies they identify with.

Even though the strategies women are using to continue playing in the field are not directly dislodging maleness and provoking significant social change, I think that they have the important indirect role of allowing these women to stay visible in the field — to keep getting up on stage week after week — and be role models for future generations of female rockers.

Bourdieu arrived at his concept of agency by inferring it as one important cause of social change. He reasons that without agency — the creative capacity for generating new variations of rules — it is difficult to explain the observable fact of social change (Bourdieu, 1980). But in this study of female rock instrumentalists, change is not apparent. Does this negate the presence of agency? I think that, contrary to negating it, this study shows that there can be signs of agency without significant social change on a structural level. Although Bourdieu might have used social change in his argument to arrive at a concept of agency, once equipped with this concept we do not need to see change to see agency. We do not need to see large-scale change to see the creative capacity of agents as they maneuver the set of social possibilities they are embedded in.

This study demonstrates how Bourdieu's concept of agency enables us to uncover microscopic expressions of agency in the basic processes of how individuals learn and then interpret the social rules that surround them. It also suggests that the change that occurs as the result of these micro-expressions of agency is indeed very gradual, and in some cases structurally imperceptible in a short-term analysis.

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Adele Keala Fournet is a musician and social researcher, originally from Fayetteville, Arkansas. She holds a B.A. in music from The New College of Florida, where she wrote her honors thesis on women in the Tampa rock music scene. She is currently conducting an ethnography of female rock instrumentalists in Lima, Peru with a Fulbright research grant as an extension of her previous work in Florida. Adele hopes to continue playing in and researching various rock music scenes throughout the world in an attempt to create a global picture of gender and contemporary rock music making. You can follow her current projects at www.adelefournet.com.

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